

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the
Cathedral Church
O F
W O R C E S T E R
U P O N, T H E

Monthly Fast-Day,

September 16. 1691.

By *WILLIAM TALBOT, D.D.*
and *DEAN of Worcester.*

Published at the Request of the *MAYOR* and
ALDERMEN of that City.

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O N

A M O S iv. 21.

Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel, and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

TH E Occasion and Design of the appointment of this days Fast having been at large declared in the Royal Edict set forth for that purpose, and after so many monthly returns of it, are, I suppose, so well known that it will not be necessary for me to spend much time in opening them to you.

Only thus much give me leave to observe by way of Preface, that we are at this time necessarily engaged in a very great Undertaking, upon the success of which depends the safety and establishment of all that can be dear to us as Men, *Englishmen*, or Protestants, the security of our Lives and Liberties, of our Civil Rights and Properties, and, which I hope we hold dearer than all, our Reformed Church and Religion.

The

The Enemies who from Abroad (and O that they were all, that we had none at Home joyning with them in carrying on the same Black Design;) the Enemies, I say, that are contriving and labouring the ruin of all these; are furnished with all those Qualities and Provisions that can make an Adversary either Odious or Formidable, to be abhorred or feared; Baseness, Treachery, Cruelty, Numbers, Wealth, Policy. The Head of them is one who breaths nothing but Blood, Fire, and Devastation; whose only glory is to make Orphans and Widows, to lay Countries Waste, and Cities in Ashes, and tinge their Rivers with innocent Gore; whose barbarity to those of the Reformed Religion, who hold the Faith as it is in Jesus, and was by him delivered to the Saints, is so unprecedented, that the Persecuting, whether Heathen or Arrian, Emperours were comparatively Nursing Fathers of the Christian and Orthodox Church; whose regard to the Sacred Ties of Promise or Oath are so small, that he seldom gives either with any other design than to make advantage by breaking them: in a word, whose Injustice, Tyranny, Cruelty and Perfidiousness have justly rendered him the common Nuisance, as well as Pest of Mankind. The whole Body of them are such as are obliged by all the ties that a pretended Infallible Church, or cunning Priests, can lay upon their credulous Profelites, that are muffled up in an Implicit Faith, and blind Obedience to their Spiritual Guides, by all methods, how Barbarous and Unchristian soever (the end will Sanctifie the Means) to Extirpate us Hereticks, as they are pleased to call us; a piece of whose Religion it is to ruin us, and who think that by Murdering us they do God, as well as their Church, good Service. A War, with such Enemies, has given occasion to this days Fast.

The

The design of which, is not that we should only impose upon our selves the easie Penitance of a few hours Abstinence from the refreshments of our Tables; spend two or three in our attendance upon the Publick Solemnities, or a day in fruitless Lamentations and Complaints; but that we should seriously, and in good earnest, set about a strict and impartial examination of our selves, search out by what sins we have been affronting and provoking our God, and consequently serving our Enemies, and contributing to our own Ruin: That we should Penitently acknowledg, humble our selves for, and resolve against them for the future; that we should put on Holy Purposes, enter into strict Obligations of new Obedience to our God, of pursuing those Means whereby we may engage Heaven to come into an Alliance with us, that we should endeavour to Know and Practice in this our Day the things that belong unto our Peace, before they be hid from our Eyes; in short, that we should exercise an unfeigned and Universal Repentance, and engage in a thorough and general Reformation.

For the furthering of which great and pious Design, The words which I have now Read, will give occasion to some Meditations, that may prove, I hope, not altogether unserviceable. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee O Israel, and because I will, &c.*

The first word the illative Particle, *Therefore*, shews us that the Verse is a Conclusion grounded upon something that went before, and for our more clear and profitable Understanding of it sends us back to the Context.

From

From the 6th. Verse we find God, by the Prophet, enumerating several Judgments that he had exercised them with, and yet complaining that for all that they had not returned unto him, such as Famine, Verses 6, 7, 8, 9. *I have given you cleanness of teeth in all cities, and want of bread in all your palaces, &c.* Such as Pestilence and Sword, Verse 10. *I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt, your young men have I slain with the sword, and made the stink of your camp to come up into your nostrils, &c.* Fire and devastation, Verse 11. *I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, &c.* but still the burden of all is, *Yet have ye not returned unto me,* and then follows in the words of the Text, *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, &c.*

Therefore, (i. e.) Because ye have defeated the Designs and Ends of my Judgments, have resisted the powerful Efforts of those Dispensations which were intended for your Admendment, and to have brought you Home unto my Self, because ye have not been Reformed by them, but continue incorrigible under them: *Therefore, Thus will I do unto thee.*

There is some little difference among Commentators concerning the Meaning of this Phrase; some think that God refers to those Judgments which he had before spoken of, as if the meaning of *I will do thus unto thee*, was, I will again inflict the same Judgments upon you, the Famine, Pestilence, Fire and Sword, which you have already smarted under.

But I rather conceive with others, that here is a Figure in the words, commonly known to Rhetoricians by the name of *Aposiopesis*, by which a person that is in anger or threatens speaks short, and suppresses part of the Sentence, as if his Passion would not give him leave to speak

speak out all that he meant : Thus *Neptune* in *Virgil*,
 when he was wroth with and chid the Winds, cries only,
Quos Ego—— whom I—— meaning, whom I will besure
 severely to chastise : So in Sacred Writ we read often
 this Expression, God do so unto me, (*i. e.*) let him in-
 flict the severest of his Curses upon me : And it is no new
 thing for God in Scripture to speak after the manner
 of Men, and for the Holy Spirit, although they are most
 abhorrent from his Nature, yet in condescension to our
 Capacities, to attribute Passions, as well as Parts to him ;
 and therefore I apprehend there is that Figure here, *I*
will do thus unto thee, i. e. I will inflict Judgments upon
 thee which I have conceived in my angry mind, but are
 too big to be worded. *And because I will do thus unto thee,*
because thou hast provoked me to come out in Judg-
ment and great fury against thee, Prepare to meet thy
God, O Israel. This Clause is likewise capable of a double
 Construction, and may either be taken for a biting Sar-
 casm, as if the great God spoke to them in derision, as
 he threatens his wretched obstinate Enemies in the first
 of the *Proverbs*, that he will laugh at their Calamity,
 and mock when their Fear comes, as if he did deridingly
 Challenge them to come forth and Combat with him,
 bid them Arm themselves with all the defensatives they
 could provide, and try if they could make their parts
 good with him.

Or else it may be Understood in another Sense, as a
 Kind and Compassionate Exhortation to them to come and
 meet him in a way of Penitence and Supplication, that so
 they might appease his Anger, and reverse the terrible
 Decree that was gone forth against them : as if, according
 to the Parable, he bid them sit down and consider whe-
 ther they were able with ten thousand to meet him that
 came against them with twenty thousand, whether poor

Dust and Ashes were able to cope with Omnipotence, the Children of *Israel* with the Ancient of Days; and if not while he was yet a great way off, before he came nigh to them in Judgment and Fury, to send an Embassy and desire conditons of Peace, to send those prevalent Ambassadors, penitential Tears and Prayers, which never fail of success at the Court of Heaven, and so the *Septuagint* Translates the Phrase, prepare to call upon the Lord thy God, and agreeably *St. Hierome* and others understand it. And to me the softness of the Expression seems to favour this Interpretation, wherein he styles himself *Their God*, prepare to meet *Thy God*, intimating to them, that however they by their heinous Provocations had justly forfeited it; yet he was unwilling that that Covenant-Relation between them, whereby he was to be their God, and they his People, should be dissolved. They were indeed a sinful People, but yet he was still ready to own himself *Their God*, thereby encouraging them to make their Applications to him.

The Meaning then of the whole Verse may be this, because thou hast been proof against those Judgments which I have in Mercy inflicted upon thee for thy Reformation, I am now resolved to pour out those upon thee which shall be for thy utter Ruin and Excision, unless thou makest use of that one opportunity which is yet left, which thy Long-Suffering God now tenders to thee; (and O that thou wouldest embrace it!) of Returning and Reconciling thy self to me by true and sincere Repentance. *Therefore Thus will I do unto thee, O Israel, &c.*

In the words thus explained we have three things Observable.

1. A dreadful Judgment denounced against *Israel*,
Thus will I do unto thee.
2. The

2. The provoking cause thereof implied in the word *Therefore* (*viz.*) their incorrigibleness under former Judgments, because I have punished you, and yet ye have not returned, *Therefore*.

3. Lastly, here is a gracious way pointed out for their Escape, *Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel*.

I shall Treat of the first and second together, and from the Judgment denounced, with the provoking cause thereof, observe to you this Position,

That when God's Judgments, upon a People or Nation, fail of their designed ends, which are to lead them to Repentance, when they are not Reformed, or made Better, but rather the Worse by them, the State of that People is desperate, they are nigh unto Excision.

Which Proposition, when I shall have briefly confirmed, I will by way of Application enquire whether God has not used these Methods to reclaim us of this Nation, and what Effects his Judgments have had upon us: and if it shall appear that notwithstanding he has Exercised us with those Dispensations, yet we have not returned unto him, but gone on incorrigibly in our sins. I suppose I may with good Reason in the last place endeavour to persuade you to prepare to meet your God by a speedy and thorough Repentance, that so we may avert those severer Retributions that hang over our Heads, and escape that ruin, which otherwise we must expect to be unavoidably involved in, which is the great Business and Design of the Day.

I. I am to shew that when God's Judgments, upon a People or Nation, fail of their designed ends, which are to lead them to Repentance, when they are not Reformed, or made Better, but rather the Worse by them, the State of that People is desperate, they are nigh unto Excision.

Now that God's design in inflicting Judgments upon a People is to bring them to Repentance, which is implied in the Proposition, is very evident from Scripture, *Isa. i.* After God had complained of his People *Israel*, that tho he had nourished and brought them up, used all Methods to institute and keep them in his Ways and Service, yet they were a rebellious and sinful Nation, a People laden with iniquity: he adds, *Why should ye be stricken, ye will revolt more and more.* As if he should have said, to what end should I bestow my Corrections and Chastisements upon you? I find they do but make you revolt more, and go the further backward from me; and they are but thrown away upon you if they have no better Effects; my ends in them are to reduce you when you are going astray, to prevent your future Deviations from me, and if they obtain not these Purposes, to what end should I Exercise you with them? If ye only revolt more, why should ye be stricken any more? 'Tis not the design of my striking to drive you farther from me, but to bring you nearer to me. Nay, In *Jer. iii.* God makes those Punishments, which he had inflicted upon *Israel*, an aggravation of *Judah's* Crime, that she did not return unto him, *Though I put away*, says he, *backsliding Israel for her adulteries, and gave her a bill of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but played the harlot also, and returned not unto me.* Verse 8. But now why should God make those Judgments, which he had laid upon

upon *Israel*, an Aggravation of *Judah's* Crime in not Repenting, and a ground of his severer Anger against her, if the design and tendency of his Judgments had not been to Reform not only those that smart under them; but even all those also to whom any notice of them should come? And to name no more places, the Apostle puts the thing out of all doubt, *Heb. xii. 10. The fathers of our flesh chasten us for their own pleasure, to gratifie it may be an angry Passion; but he the Father of Spirits, God chastens us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.* This is the end of his Chastisements and Punishments to work Goodness and Vertue in us, to make us partakers of Holiness.

And 'tis evident that Punishments have a natural tendency to these ends. Nothing more apt to make us out of love with our sins than the smarting a little for them; the tasting of the bitterness that is hid under these gilded Pills, if any thing, will make us disrelish and nauseate them; when we feel nothing but the pleasure of the sin we are enamoured with it, and greedily pursue it; but when we are sensible of the smart and misery that attend it, then we begin to abate of our love and value for it. A long Series of Impunity and Prosperity is apt to make a People wax Fat and forget God; but in their Afflictions they will seek him early or diligently, as the Prophet speaks. When therefore he sees a Nation revolting from him, committing Whoredoms against him, prostituting themselves to their Lusts, forsaking him and cleaving to their Vices, then he lays his Rod upon them to convince them how bitter and grievous a thing it is to depart from the living God; then he throws in a dash of Gall of Wormwood to embitter those satisfactions and delights to them, which they are so in love with.

Which

Which as it is a very great demonstration of the goodness of our Heavenly Father, when the very severest of his Dispensations to the Sons of Men are instances of his Mercy to them, his very Judgments tokens of his Paternal Love, and the designed ends of his Punishments and Corrections, the Good and Reformation of his People, so must it mightily inhanche the guilt of those sinners that are not wrought upon by such gracious and efficacious Methods.

Chiefly because these are commonly the last remedies that God tries to reduce them, he does not ordinarily use these till he finds softer Methods ineffectual, and if these work not with a People, but they are proof against them also, what will become of them? When a Physician has Cupt and Scarified, and used his last methods upon a Patient, if they have no Effects he gives him over, if he continues stupid and insensible under those Operations, it is a sign he is near his end.

Beloved, God Almighty does not strike or inflict Punishments, till he finds he cannot win us by fair means; Punishing is his strange Work, he afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the Children of Men; he had rather allure us by Kindness, draw us with the Cords of a Man, with the Bands of Love: but when he finds that his gentler dealings will not reduce us, that we are made loose and dissolute by kindness, emboldened and encouraged in our sins by his forbearance, then he uses his severer Dispensations, then he lashes and strikes us, visits our Iniquities upon us, to make us in some measure feel the dreadful Consequences of them; but if this will not do, this his last method cannot affect or amend us, there remain no more for us.

And

our Child and Brother, our Son and Brother, will
 not be from us, and we shall not be from him, and
 will be in making a noble return of Mercy upon all, will
 send our Son to be with you, and be the Administration
 of it to you, will continue to us our
 Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord,
 O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord,
 who would be in the Spirit of God, and the
 Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord,
 Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord,

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And when once a Nation has overcome all God's Arts of preserving them, and made themselves ripe for Destruction, Execution will quickly follow.

For it is not with a Nation as with a particular Person; a particular Person may have filled up the measure of his sins, made himself ripe for Ruin, and yet his Punishment may be deferred, it may be not Executed all his Life; yea possibly he may enjoy the affluence of all good things. The Scriptures frequently speak of the flourishing condition of particular wicked Men, and their exemption from those Plagues and Miseries, which others better than themselves are subject to, and labour under; their iniquities may have been full, and yet no present Judgment awarded out against them: but as to Kingdoms and Nations God's Procedure is quite different, when the sins of a Nation are full, present Execution succeeds, as is plain from the History of God's dealing, whether with his own People or with other Nations.

And there is this Reason for this difference in God's Procedure; particular Persons are capable of Retributions in another Life after this, there is a time coming when they may be called to account, and sufficiently punished for their sins; though their Iniquities are not visited here, though they do not smart under God's Judgments in this Life, but seem rather to inherit the Favours of Heaven, yet as long as there is a Day appointed; a day of destruction which they are reserved to, wherein their short lived Impunity, it may be Jollity here, shall be turned into an eternity of Tribulation, and Anguish, and Pain; this may be without any impeachment of God's Holiness, Truth, or Justice.

C

But

But for Nations or Kingdoms it is otherwise, for a Nation or Kingdom, considered as such, is not capable of any Retributions in a Life after this; for in the Resurrection we shall not be considered as Persons embodied in such or such a Community: In the Resurrection there is no Marrying, or giving in Marriage says our Saviour: In the other World we shall not live in those Capacities we do here, all Relations that are among us now will then cease; all such as Husband and Wife, Prince and People, King and Subject, be quite swallowed up in that World: And therefore since the Relations and Societies of this World shall then be Dissolved; it is clear that a Nation, as a Nation, cannot receive any Retributions in another Life after this. because then it will cease to be a Nation, and cannot therefore be Rewarded or Punished as such; from whence it is certain that every Nation shall meet with the present Returns of their wickedness here, because God will be sure to shew himself as Just in his Dealings with Nations as with particular Persons, and that he can no more pass by the sins of one than of the other.

From all which we may conclude, that when a People or Nation have resisted all God's endeavours for their Reformation, the strivings of his Mercies, and the efforts of his Judgments, too; will neither hearken to the still Voice of his Kindness, nor the louder Voice of his Rod; are not only made bold and secure by his forbearance, but hardened in the fire of Affliction; when they despise all his Arts for their amendment, and have no impressions made upon them by his utmost, last, most effectual Method; the state surely of that Nation is desperate, and the day of their Ruin and utter Excision not far off.

To

To apply then what has been said to our selves: Let us, I beseech you, take an impartial view of our selves, and of God's Dispensations towards us of this Nation; let us examine whether he has not been using the same Methods to reclaim us that he Exercised *Israel* with, and what Effects they have had upon us.

I need not go so far back as to the Ages of our Forefathers, I need only refresh your Memories, and put you in mind of various Judgments that God has poured out upon this Kingdom in your own time, even the very same that he here in the Text threatens *Israel* for their incorrigibleness under.

For has he not overthrown some of us as well as them, as he did *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, consumed not only the greatest part of the Metropolis of our Land with a devouring Fire, and made it a heap of Rubbish and Ashes, but many other of our lesser Towns, as the frequent Briefs, of late years especially, inform us, and some of them with Fire immediately from Heaven?

Has he not also sent the Pestilence among us after the manner of *Aegypt*, visited this Land with a sweeping Plague that carried away many thousands to their long Home?

Have not our young Men too been slain with the Sword, have we not been engaged in Wars at Home and Abroad? and all those three of his sore Judgments befallen us within the memory of most of us?

And as for the fourth, which the Prophet mentions, that of cleanness Teeth, though, blessed be his name, we

have not lately laboured under a Famine of our dayly Bread for the support of our Natural Lives; yet, Has he not been lately threatning us with a far severer Famine, a Famine of the Word of God? and Man shall not live by Bread only, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of God. Were we not apprehensive not long since, and had we not too good Grounds for it, that he was going to remove our Candlestick, to deprive us of that pure Religion, and excellent way of Worship we are blessed with, and to give us up to Popish Superstition and Idolatry, into the Hands of those Men that would have taken from us the sincere Milk of the Word, that Food which God has afforded us for the nourishment of our Souls to Eternal Life, and would have starved us with lying Legends instead thereof?

Were not the Emisaries of *Rome*, the implacable Enemies of our Church and Religion, labouring with all their might: and industriously improving the favourable opportunities, they enjoyed under the last Reign, to destroy ours and establish their own Religion? and were they not too likely in all human appearance to have been too successful? Had they not made a very large Progress for so short a time? Did not their Priests appear every where barefaced in despite of our Laws? Did they not commit their Abominations, celebrate their Idolatrous Services in the most publick and conspicuous places in the Kingdom? Had they not built many Altars and High Places for that purpose? Had they not seized some of our Seminaries, part of our Universities, to breed up a Succession of disciplined and instructed persons to carry on and finish the Work they had begun? Did they not openly solicit all they had opportunity or hopes of Perverting, using all Methods, offering Rewards and Preferments to some, threatning, menacing others to make them comply with

with them: in a word, Did they not look upon themselves as secure of gaining their Point? And had they not all the Reason to hope, as we to fear, that they should have triumphed in the ruins of this Church and Religion, that either a furious Zeal for their Cause, an irreconcilable Hatred to us, a Serpentine Subtilty, indefatigable Industry, the favour of the Government, the Laws as they were managed, the Army, almost all Offices Military and Civil in their Hands, and the assured expectation of a Foreign Assistance could afford them? And if we seem now in some measure to be delivered from these designs of theirs, if God seem now to have removed this Judgment, yet believe me, if we answer not his ends and designs in Threatning us with it, the present suspension of it will not prove a total removal, but only a lightning before death, a putting back of his Arm to strike with a greater force.

Nay, Is not God at this time making bare his Arm against us? Are we not unavoidably engaged in a War with a neighbouring and very potent Prince? and May we not expect all the Hostilities and Injuries that his equal Hatred to our Nation and Religion, his Politick Counsellors, the Wealth of his whole Kingdom, or his numerous Forces can suggest to, or enable him to put in Execution?

And which is yet a more sad consideration? Has not God sent a Spirit of Faction and Division among us? Are we not unreasonably disunited among our selves, broken and crumbled into Sects and Parties, regardless of the Common Enemy, and only jealous of, and watchful against one another? And can a Kingdom so divided against it self long stand?

Thus, my Brethren, has God been Manuring and Cultivating this Land of ours, with various Chastisements
and

and Corrections, to try if he could make it bring forth the *Peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*: when he found that though *favour were shewn to us we would not learn righteousness*, he sent his Judgments, his last reserve, to try if they could teach our Inhabitants that Lesson.

And what effects have his Judgments had upon us? Have we hearkned unto the Voice of his Rod, and answered the ends of his Corrections? Has the Fire of Affliction refined and purged us from our Dross and Corruption? Have his Severities mortified our Sins and Vices? Has the Lance let out the imposthumated Putrefaction? Has his visiting our Iniquities upon us made us out of love with them, and his Terrors persuaded us to forsake them? Have we been more fearful to offend him, more careful to please him, more awfully regardful of his Majesty, more Zealous for his Honor, more diligent and constant in our attendance upon his Service and our Duty?

'Tis certainly no time to dissemble with God, and impose upon our selves, the Day calls for sincerity and impartiality in our examinations: and, if we will speak the truth, Have we not been proof against these Methods of Gods too, and as we have abused his Mercy, and despised his Goodness, so defied his Judgments also?

For does there not every where appear barefaced the same daring Impiety against God, the same Atheistical Scoffing at Religion, the same Neglect and Contempt of his Worship, the same Profanation of his Word by drolling upon it, and lightly using it in common Conversation; the same Profanation of his Name by horrid Oaths, Curses, and Imprecations; the same Profanation of his Day by converting it to Secular uses, spending it

in

in worldly Business, idle Pastimes, and vicious Practices; the same Profanation of his House by wilfully abstaining from it, or coldly, formally, or irreverently behaving our selves at it? Does there not appear the same injustice and uncharitableness to our Neighbours, the same Circumvention and Defraudation in Bargaining, the same false Weights and Measures in Buying and Selling, the same Extortion, Oppression, and Deceit in all Dealings, the same uncharitable Censuring, Backbiting and Detraction? Does there not appear the same Intemperance and Incontinence against our selves, the same Revelling and Drunkenness, the same Chambering and Wantonness? In a word, Is there not the same general Dissolution of Manners, the same unrestrained Practice of Wickedness of all sorts and degrees, as there was before God made use of those his Judgments, which I have enumerated, to Reclaim and Reform us?

Nay, Are we not by insensible degrees arrived to a strange impudence in sinning, not known to former Ages? Men were content formerly to sin secretly, would look out for the most private places and closest Retirements to perpetrate their Villanies in: Time was when the Fool could think it enough to say in his Heart there is no God, when the Adulterer would watch for the twilight, that the darkness might cover his foul Embraces, when those that were Drunk would be Drunk in the Night, that the Sun and Men might not be Witnesses of their worse than brutal Practices: Sinners were then so modest that they would blush upon a Discovery:

But now Men have worn off all that silly bashfulness, are so far from seeking privacies to commit, or excuses to palliate their Sins, that they publish them as *Sodom*, and glory in their shame. The Streets the most conspicuous places

places are conscious to the most daring Blasphemies, the most provoking Oaths and Curses, the most beastly Intemperances and Uncleannesses, the most crying Murders; nay these are things which Men value themselves upon, take a pride in recounting how many Men they have Murdered with the Sword, or with the Bottle, how many Women they have abused and ruined, how many Protestants they have made to Atheism, and how effectually cleared themselves from all suspicion of Vertue and Probity.

And then if this be our case, if God has smitten us and we remain incorrigible, and all his Discipline has only served to advance us to a greater proficiency in the Devils School, if he has used the same Methods to reduce us that he did to *Israel*, and we give him the same Reason that they did to complain, that yet we have not returned unto him; what can we expect but that he should threaten us as he did them in the Text, that *Therefore thus he will do unto us; pour out upon us Vials of severer Judgments then we have yet felt, even till he has made a full end of us?*

And what shall we do, as the Prophet asks, *in the day of visitation, and in the desolation that shall come from far, and to whom shall we fly for help?*

Why, Behold God has answered the Prophets question in the latter part of the Text, *Prepare to meet thy God O Israel*, endeavour to appease him as *Jacob* did his angry Brother *Esau* by sending a Present before him, and peradventure he will accept of us.

But wherewithal shall we come before the Lord, and bow our selves before the high God? shall we come with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

No



No, That which the Lord thy God now requires of thee is to kill thy brutish Lusts, and not thy Beasts; to Sacrifice not a Bull or a Goat, but the Violence of one, and Laciviousness of the other; to offer not a Lamb or a Dove, but a Penitent broken Heart, and to labour after the Meekness and Innocency of those inoffensive Creatures; the *Sacrifices of God are a troubled spirit, a contrite heart he will not despise*; let us but offer that to him, and it will *please him better than a Bullock that has Horns and Hoofs*: Let us but prepare to meet our God in a way of Penitence and Supplication, and he will, like the indulgent Father in the Parable, while we are yet a far off have compassion upon us, and run to meet us, and lovingly imbrace us.

And what Arguments shall I press upon you to ingage you to set immediately upon this great and necessary Work, to try and examine impartially every one his own Heart and Ways, to search out what those sins are which each in particular has been guilty of, for which God has been striking, and is still shaking his Rod over us; to humble our selves before him in the lowest Prostration, to abhor our selves in Dust and Ashes, earnestly to implore his Pardon for them, sincerely to resolve against them, and upon new and better Obedience for the time to come?

Shall I tell you that this is it which God is at this time calling you to? Calling you not only by me the most unworthy of all his Ambassadors, but by the louder and more audible Voice of his Rod, (for his Rod has a Voice *hear ye the Rod*) and this is the Voice of it *Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye dye?*

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Shall

Shall I tell you that this is it which Authority is this day calling you to? The meaning and design of this Monthly Fast enjoyed by their Majesties, as I observed in the beginning, is not that you should only deprive your Stomachs of a Meals Meat, much less that you should spare from your Tables to consume upon your Lusts, least of all that should abstain from your Food and Vices one day, that you may return to both with the greater Appetite the next; *Not that you should hang down your heads like bulrushes, and spread sackcloth and ashes, as the Prophet speaks, not that you should only put on a dejected Countenance, and some outward shews of sorrow, but that you should humble your souls for your sins, that You should loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, and break every yoke; that you should wash and make clean, put away the evil of your doings from before the eyes of the Lord, and turn to him with full purpose of heart.*

This design of working a general Reformation in their Subjects their Majesties have been endeavouring to accomplish, not only by appointing such frequent days of Humiliation, but by Letters and Orders of Council directed to the Subordinate Magistrates, and to the Clergy, whereby we are obliged to Read in our Churches, and the Magistrates to put in Execution our wholesome Laws against those Pests and Troublers of our *Israel*; our common Drunkards, Swearers, and Sabbath-Breakers: And let me beseech those of you to whom the Execution of Justice is committed, by the Bowels and Mercies of God that you be Zealous and Impartial in Animadverting upon such scandalous Offenders, that so those Wretches, whom the future and unseen Retributions of another World can make no Impressions upon, may be deterred by

by the inflictions of the Penalties of the Laws from their bold and fearless Commission of those crying Sins, which are so reproachful to our Holy Profession, so provoking in the Eyes of God, and of such dangerous Consequence to our Church and Nation.

Shall I to this add, what the last words suggest to me, that this is it which the said deplorable Estate of our divided Church and Nation calls you to, whose Fall and Ruin must unavoidably attend your refusing to answer these Calls: And were you but affected as Holy Men of old have been, as *Jeremy* who wished *his head waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears that he might weep for the slain of the daughter of his people*, or as *Isaiah* who wept bitterly, and would not be comforted because of the spoiling of the Daughter of his People; had you but the same Affection to our *Jerusalem*, did you wish as well to our *Sion* as they did to theirs, you would give Ear to her pitiful Cry, compassionate her lamentable Condition, and endeavour by your Repentance to raise her up, and prevent her ruin. And what shall I say more to press you to it, what Motives can I add to these I have now suggested? If neither the Pathetical beseeching of your Native Kingdom and Reformed Church, in whose Wellfare or Misery every one of us must more or less share; nor the Pious Injunctions of your Governors, whose Just and Righteous Commands ought to be of weight with you; nor the more forcible Call of God himself, who will be sure severely to revenge the Affront you will offer by turning the Deaf Ear to him: If none of these can prevail with you, neither love to your Selves and Country, respect to your Sovereigns, nor fear of God work with you; what Arguments can be effectual? If you will neither hearken to the loud importunate Call of God nor Man in a matter of such vast importance to your selves, it is

to be feared, you will never hearken to any thing till you hear God say depart ye Cursed.

But, My Brethren, give me leave to hope better things concerning you, and things that make for Peace, that you will at last hearken to, and obey these earnest and affectionate Solicitations, that you will break off your sins by *Repentance, and cast away your transgressions, whereby you have transgressed, and become new creatures, that iniquity may not be our ruin*; that you will each and every of you set about Reforming and Amending one; and this day resolve and enter upon a course of Penitence and Newness of Life, that so God may be intreated for the Land.

But some one may object, of what great concern to the Nation can my single Repentance or Impenitence be? I am but one, and surely cannot by one or the other much forward or hinder the Kingdoms either welfare or ruin: There are enow besides to do the Work without me, I may enjoy my Lusts and Vices, and let others Repent for the Nation.

But 1. What if all, and every one in the Nation, should think and do the same, would not the Work be well done then? And all have just the same Reason, *i. e.* none at all, For

2. The sins of every single Person, and thine in particular have added to, and made up that Measure of Iniquity, which has angered God, and provoked him to shake his Rod over the Kingdom, and therefore it is but Reason and Justice that since thou hast contributed to that Mass and Weight which is ready to sink the Kingdom into ruin, thou shouldest bear thy part in taking off the Load. Besides,

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3. How knowest thou but thy single Repentance may Save, or at least Reprieve the Nation? Time was when ten Righteous Men, if so many could have been found in *Sodom*, would have preserved that place; and how canst thou tell but by thy sincere Conversion thou maist make up that number for whose sakes God will spare this Land? And would it not be matter of Melancholy Reflection to thee, if for want of thee such a number should not be found for which God would spare it? But

4. Should there be enough without thee to do the Work, should God for the sake of others of his Servants, that cry day and night to him, spare us, and turn our days of Humiliation into days of Thanksgiving, yet what right canst thou pretend to any share in the Mercy? Thou that refusest to hearken to the Words of Gods Embassadors, how canst thou expect any other Fate than that of the incredulous Lord, that disbelieved *Elisha's* Prophecy of Plenty, *2 Kings* vii. That with thine Eyes possibly thou maist see, but shall not partake of the blessing. Whereas,

Lastly, If thy Repentance should prove unsuccessful for the Kingdom, if the Sins thereof should be so Ripe, their Iniquities so Full that God will not spare it, yet assuredly thou shalt deliver thine own Soul, so the Spirit of God assures thee *Ezek. xiv. That when a land has sinned so grievously against God that his hand is stretched out, and he will not accept of the fasting tears and prayers of Noah, Daniel, and Job, for the deliverance of the land, yet they shall deliver their own souls.*

Away then with such idle put offs, let us not shift off this necessary duty from one to another, but having

having such invitations and such encouragements, let every of us set to our Parts, and contribute each ones Tears, Prayers, and Repentance to the Reversing the Decree that is gone forth against us : so let us prepare to meet our God who is still ready to own that Relation; yea desirous to Repent him of the evil that he thought to do unto us, and to make our *Jerusalem* yet a praise upon the whole Earth.

Where then are the Penitent *Davids* and *Jeremy's* , that may weep Tears for the sins of a Nation to wash away the guilt thereof? Where are the Meek *Moses's* , the chosen ones of God, that may stand in the Gap, and turn away his wrath that he destroy us not? Where are the faithful *Abrahams* , the Friends of God, that may intercede powerfully, and successfully for a sinful and disobedient People? Yea, where are the ten Righteous for whose sakes God will spare the Place? Would it not, my Brethren, be a glorious thing for you and me to make a part of that number for whose sakes God would spare this Nation, to be the Saviours of the Kingdom? Why such are all the truly Contrite and Penitent Souls in the Land.

O then let us favour the Stones of *Sion* , let it pity us to see her in the Dust, let us pray for the Peace of *Jerusalem* , and let us live and Repent for it too; and then we shall not need to fear all the Enemies of our *Sion* , for God will be for us, and if he be for us who can be against us? Then let the Children of *Ammon* , and *Moab* , and Mount *Seir* , the *Philistines* , with them that dwell at *Tyre* , come forth to Battle against us, they shall not be able to prevail over us, for there will be many with us: Then we may bid defiance to all the Power and Policy of *France* , and treachery of home-bred Enemies, for our God will be
our

our Guide and Protector, our Shield and Buckler, will secure us from Foreign and Domestick Adversaries, yea, will bless us in making a visible return of Mercy upon us, will cause our Nation to Flourish, and be the Admiration and Envy of its Neighbours, will continue to us our excellently Constituted Government, and preserve our Primitive Apostolical Church, that neither the designs of those who would betray us into Slavery or Anarchy shall succeed to the Subversion of one, nor the Gates of Hell or *Rome* prevail against the other. *Amen.*

F I N I S.
